

# Strategies that Succeed

## Stories from the SAGE Project

### 9. Girls' Education Is "News" in El Salvador

**O**n the back of a public bus, which follows its route through neighborhoods of central San Salvador, a poster on girls' education draws the attention of hundreds of passersby every day. In a country where the importance of girls' education has not received much public attention, the media is proving to be a strong ally in raising awareness across the country.

Implemented by the Academy for Educational Development, SAGE has been working in five countries (Guinea, Mali,

the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana and El Salvador) to develop multisectoral partnerships in support of girls' education. In El Salvador, partnerships with the public sector, business, the media, and communities have been developed.

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*El Salvador's First Lady awards prizes for the Palomitas de Papel contest.*

At first glance, girls' primary school enrollment figures in El Salvador are nearly equal to those of boys. But this picture masks differences between urban and rural areas, and gender gaps in retention, achievement, and completion. Partnership with the media is an important strategy utilized by the Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) project in El Salvador for putting the issue of girls' education on the national agenda.



*Media inserts promote girls' education nationwide.*

### **Plant Your Tomorrow: Support from "Palomitas de Papel"**

One of SAGE's most strategic partners is *La Prensa Gráfica*, El Salvador's leading daily newspaper. It donated space in fifteen issues of "Palomitas de Papel", a two-page weekly insert devoted to children's issues. "Palomitas de Papel" has different sections: the "Values Page" on Thursdays, "Little Step by Step" on Saturdays and the Sunday edition that is subdivided into different sections with topics such as a kids' club

and reading skills games. Space in the "Values Page," was set aside for SAGE coverage of girls' education issues.

To develop this partnership, several meetings were held with the pedagogical advisor of "Palomitas de Papel". A formal meeting with the Editor and Editor-in-Chief took place in

November 2001, formalizing the agreement and establishing the date of the first publication. Through regular coverage, SAGE was seeking to sensitize children and adults on the importance of supporting and encouraging girls to complete their education and stay in school.

Each week SAGE prepared contributions which would normally take the form of:

- Photo essays on role models, local girls' and teenagers who are outstanding in their

academic performance and also excel in other areas such as sports, arts and technology. Parents who are keeping their daughters in school despite their socioeconomic circumstances were also interviewed.

- Educational and didactic games in which messages on girls' education were incorporated.

SAGE collaborated with "Palomitas de Papel" in the research done to locate successful girl students who became the featured role models. SAGE identified successful urban as well as successful rural girls, students from a wide range of economic backgrounds, and representing a diversity of contexts. The motto of the SAGE-Palomitas pages was, "*Plant your Tomorrow*".

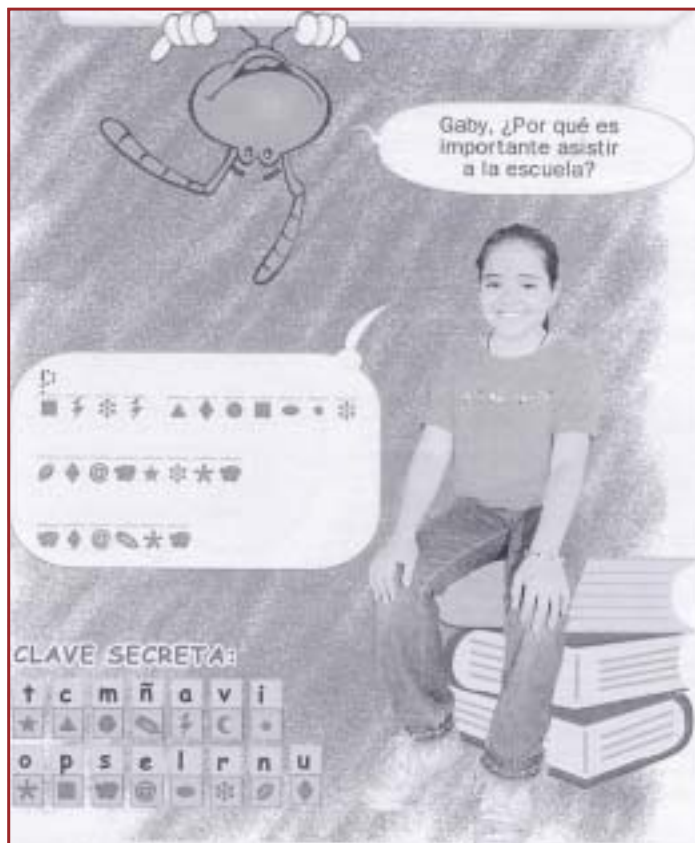
In addition to the "Values Pages", SAGE and *La Prensa Gráfica* cosponsored a contest to encourage girls and boys to attend school. The official opening of the contest was launched at a Press Conference attended by the Vice-Minister of Education. Details of the contest were publicized in "Palomitas de Papel". The children's component of the contest included a

*The real cost of having a two-page color publication for fifteen issues is approximately \$68,000. This cost was donated by La Prensa Gráfica. The newspaper has nationwide coverage and many teachers and parents use "Palomitas de Papel" as a permanent source of reference on educational topics.*

drawing (for the smaller children) and a creative writing paragraph (for the older children) illustrating the importance of girls' enrolment, retention, and completion of school. Teachers, on behalf of their schools, could also enter the contest by completing a piece of a puzzle presented each week in an issue of Palomitas. When each puzzle piece was completed, the entire puzzle read "All of us, girls and boys, go to school!"

Over 6,000 contest entries were received. Winners received individual prizes donated by two construction companies and books provided by Editorial Santillana, a book publishing company. SAGE El Salvador, with financial assistance from a local office supply store, presented a computer to each of the two winning schools. Food provided during the Awards Ceremony was donated by Pollo Campero, a nationwide fried chicken restaurant chain.

Following the enormous success of the SAGE editions of "Palomitas de Papel", the Editor of the newspaper proposed that the publications be used as an instruc-



*"Gaby, why is it important to go to school?" asks this girl. The answer is contained in the secret code.*

tional resource in the government Child Care Centers (CBIs) and in all

public schools. This initiative received the wholehearted support of the First

### *Examples of editions on girls' education issues in Palomitas de Papel:*

*"Equity for Everyone" provided basic information regarding the SAGE project and emphasized the importance of studying and staying in school.*

*"I want to be a great teacher" illustrates the school situation, particularly of girls in rural areas.*

*"I have music in my blood" is about one of the youngest members of the Juvenile National Symphonic Orchestra.*

Lady of El Salvador, who sent a written appeal to the head of the CBIs. Such an initiative would have not been possible without the strong partnership that SAGE has also forged with the National Secretariat of the Family (SNF) and the Ministry of Education (MINED).

### Final Note

Through the partnership with *La Prensa Gráfica*, SAGE has drawn the attention of Salvadorans to the critical issue of girls' education. In rural areas in particular, communities have a renewed awareness of girls' education as a national issue. Working with *La Prensa Gráfica* has enabled SAGE to leverage additional media

coverage of girls' enrolment, retention, and achievement issues. Thanks to the weekly success stories appearing in "Palomitas de Papel", girls now have role.

### References

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